



'The Doctor', from painting to ceramic figurine: new insights in the age of Covid-19

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'The Doctor', from painting to ceramic figurine: new insights in the age of Covid-19

This paper will reflect on the discovery, in a Japanese factory storeroom, of a ceramic figurine based on *The Doctor*, a painting made in 1891 by Sir Luke Fildes. Commissioned by Sir Henry Tate, the painting depicts a Victorian physician tending to a sick boy while his stricken parents watch on. The ceramic figurine was commissioned for the US market and designed and mass-produced in Seto, Japan, in 1974. The paper will trace this material trajectory from canvas to ceramic, providing insights into the design and manufacturing processes. At a time when the embattled NHS is being valorised for its struggle against the pandemic, the ideal of a carer's understated heroism embodied in the figurine seems to gain new resonance and currency. The figure is at once material evidence of global capitalism and changing design tastes, as well as a provocation to consider how the contemporary past might be remembered.

Profile

Dr Christopher McHugh is a Lecturer in Ceramics at Belfast School of Art, Ulster University, UK. His practice-led ceramics research explores the relationship between artistic and archaeological methodologies, often focusing on particular archives, museum collections and communities. Since 2015, he has undertaken research in Seto, Japan, about the city's post-war ceramic figurine industry.

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Format: 15 minute pre-recorded paper (could also be delivered as a poster or via Twitter)

Keywords: archaeology, ceramics, design



The Doctor figurine made in 1974.

This paper will develop upon themes discussed in this newspaper article:

<https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/clippings/old-ceramic-offers-fresh-take-on-good-doctors-modern-society>